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UNCLAS LILONGWE 000382

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
NAIROBI FOR REGIONAL LABOR OFFICER
GENEVA FOR ILO REP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ELAB PGOV EFIN KDEM MI

SUBJECT: GOM AGAIN CO-OPTS LABOR UNION; "APPOINTS" ILO
REPRESENTATIVE

¶11. (U) At Labor Day festivities on May 1, President Muluzi appointed Malawi Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU) President Sunduzwayo Madise, who was recently convicted of corruption, as Malawi's "representative" to the International Labor Organization (ILO). Muluzi also donated MK 10 million (USD 95,000) to MCTU and instructed government to find a building for the umbrella union to use, as it cannot afford its current rent.

¶12. (U) While ostensibly supporting the principles of fair labor practices, Muluzi said: "Unions are not enemies of the government. When they get help from government, they should not be seen as having been bought."

COMMENT

¶13. (SBU) Apparently uninformed about ILO operations, Muluzi appointed Madise as Malawi's "representative to the ILO," a position which does not exist, rather than as Labor Attaché in Brussels, as Malawi has not had diplomatic representation in Geneva since 1994. Opposition parties have condemned the move, saying that with Malawi's current budgetary problems, the government should be reducing the number of its diplomatic missions. Muluzi has also been criticized for making the eleventh hour appointment so close to the May 18 general elections when his term expires. Many perceive the appointment as a payback for Madise keeping Malawi's largest union quiescent.

¶14. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: Muluzi's politically-motivated appointment of the MCTU President and his "government help" for the union, while clearly prompted by the approaching elections, typify the GOM's interference in union activities. The once robust labor movement, which played an influential role in Malawi's 1994 transition to multi-party democracy, has been crippled by internal disputes, much of which has been inspired by meddling from the highest levels of government. END COMMENT.

BIO NOTE: Sunduzwayo Madise

¶15. (U) Madise was convicted on two counts of corruption in November 2001 and was fined MK 50,000 (USD 500). He was found guilty of accepting a USD 4,000 bribe from Global African Football Incorporated (GAF) consultant Ian Riley to award the television firm rights to air a Malawi-South Africa World Cup soccer match. Madise also wrongfully allowed Riley to pay hotel bills amounting to USD 400.

¶16. (SBU) Madise was elected MCTU President in January 2004 amid great controversy and calls for a re-vote. Madise's position was further challenged in February 2004, when the Ministry of Labor ordered Madise to leave the position because Malawian law enjoins convicted criminals from holding union offices. The matter has been referred to the courts, and in the meantime Madise has been acting as the MCTU's president.

BROWNING